

Fenway Park's "Green Monster"

Constructed in 1912, Fenway Park is the oldest major league ballpark in active use in the country. Shoehorned into the street layout of its urban setting and featuring brick, concrete, and steel materials, and a seating configuration close to the field, Fenway Park reflects the distinctive characteristics of ballparks built during the early 20th century. Fenway Park played an important role in the national development of the cultural and social institution of baseball and is also significant for its historical association with important figures in baseball history, including legends such as Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio, and Carl Yastrzemski.

Fenway is further significant as one of only three surviving parks from the so-called "Golden Age" of baseball parks (1909-1923). Parks of this era were notable for their urban locations, a desire to place seats as close to the playing field as possible, classical architectural detail, and larger (for their day) capacities. As with many of these parks, Fenway Park was inserted into an existing street pattern, resulting in an oddly shaped footprint and a unique field configuration. These "classic" parks, constructed of concrete and steel, were a departure from the earlier wood framed designs. Only three of these parks remain today: Wrigley Field, Fenway Park, and Tiger Stadium. Other parks built during this era, such as Brooklyn's Ebbetts Field, Pittsburgh's Forbes Field, and New York's Polo Grounds have long disappeared, while other parks such as Yankee Stadium have lost their historic integrity due to extensive reconstruction. Tiger Stadium opened the same day as Fenway Park and was unfortunately vacated after the 1999 baseball season. Its demolition is expected, making Fenway Park the oldest Major League baseball park in the country. While Fenway Park has evolved over the years, it still maintains its architectural integrity through the retention of its distinctive and original tapestry brick facade, fenestration patterns, wall heights, field configurations, and intimate seating. To Red Sox fans and general baseball

aficionados alike, Fenway Park is a national baseball landmark and a veritable mecca. Its tangible and intangible qualities have attracted pilgrims from across the country and around the world and make it the romantic ideal of the glory of America's "national pastime." Its significance extends beyond the realm of the game of baseball and it could be said that Fenway Park is the most recognizable of any sports facility in the entire country by both name and appearance. Tourists from all walks of life include Fenway Park on their visits of historic Boston. The Boston Red Sox and the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau claim that Fenway Park is Massachusetts' number one tourist attraction.

Rules Change for the 21st Century

As the oldest Major League ballpark, Fenway Park represents an era of baseball when the sport was more accessible. As baseball has developed into an industry and big business, the design of the baseball sports facility has reflected these changes. New parks may have brought more comfort and revenue generating opportunities, but certain classic elements of the game have been lost. "New facilities standardized and depersonalized the sport while allowing more fans to see the game. The modern structures further separate the players from the fans, and generally remove much of the previous informality."¹ Fenway Park's historical significance is heightened further when considering these recent trends in the baseball industry and the current plans to replace it with a larger new stadium. The Red Sox' "official" web site states:

One of the joys of New England life is returning to the Chapel that is the home of the Boston Red Sox: Fenway Park. Unlike other Shrines, though, this House of Worship generates electricity. It is a place where visitors can see the invisible murals that have been painted and left behind by the men who have played there in years gone by. Though generations have come and gone, Fenway remains, much like it did the day it opened on April 20, 1912. Fenway Park is a standing museum commemorating the names and feats of the players whose names alone evoke emotions.

The web site also references the significance of the famous left field wall stating, "There is nothing else like it in baseball. It has its own name and history. It has become one of the most recognizable features in all of sport. Many have tried to imitate it, but none have been able to match the uniqueness of the 'Green Monster'."² Fenway Park's "Green Monster" will soon be sacrificed to honor the "Greed Monster" as the Red Sox follow the lead of countless other Major League teams to build a "retro-style" stadium with luxury seating, expanded food courts, personal seat licenses, and the prominent name of a corporate sponsor. Ironically, the Red Sox themselves will attempt to imitate and match the uniqueness of the "Green Monster," the invisible murals of baseball's history, and the intangible draw that is unique only to Fenway Park. This is a story not of how ballparks have evolved over time to accommodate more spectators, but rather how America's favorite pastime and its historic venues have been lost to the power of big money and a political system that serves the rich and powerful at the expense of the average fan and the average taxpayer.³

Over the past decade the symmetrical, synthetic-turfed, multipurpose "mega-stadiums" built in the 1960s and 1970s have been replaced with single-use baseball parks that attempt to emulate the characteristics of the nation's historic ballparks, particularly Fenway Park. As a result, new ballparks have sprouted up across the country with designs and layouts that have incorporated the best features of the classic parks. The formula used for these new "nostalgic" parks include locating them in downtown areas, providing open vistas to city skylines, and creating playing fields that possess irregular characteristics such as an asymmetrical layout, varied outfield wall sizes, and irregular angulation.⁴ Fenway was, in fact, looked to as a model for the most well known of these newer parks—Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore and Jacobs Field in Cleveland. As "classic" baseball parks like Comiskey Park in Chicago and Tiger Stadium in Detroit continue to disappear as a result of the new stadium wave, the opportunity to experience a Major League baseball game in an authentic traditional setting is quickly fading away. The loss of Fenway Park would mean the physical end of baseball's long history and traditional connection to the core of the America's favorite pastime and the demise of a sports culture that has permeated the life of New Englanders and Red Sox fans across the country.

This threat to Boston's Fenway Park as the wrecking ball waits to take its first swing is a preservation issue of the utmost importance.

Another Loss for Historic Preservation and Baseball Tradition

The Red Sox management, which has long used Fenway Park's history as a selling point to market the team to fans, is now prepared to obliterate that history along with the surrounding community that shares its name. Although the ball club has claimed it will preserve the essence of Fenway by retaining a portion of the c. 1912 façade and by incorporating a piece of the left field wall in a prominent location in the proposed complex across the street, the construction of the new \$665 million ballpark will involve the eminent domain taking and demolition of adjacent commercial properties in the area, and substantial changes to the residential character of the nearby Fenway neighborhood. The public purpose being served to justify the use of eminent domain according to the recently passed legislation is that of "urban renewal" and the prevention of blight. This "need" for urban renewal is contrary to the fact that the Fenway area boasts land values among the most expensive in Boston and is under intensive development pressure as it undergoes a long awaited resurgence.

Red Sox management has argued that Fenway Park does not meet current revenue needs necessary to remain both profitable and competitive. The project requires a mix of public and private funds and if built will be the most expensive stadium project in U.S. history. The only way for this project to actually make money for the Red Sox is for the public to play a major partnering role in this venture. By keeping the private share of the project at a minimum, the team ownership is guaranteed to win. Loyal Red Sox fans are rightfully torn, particularly when told that the new stadium is necessary to guarantee the successful performance of the team on the field and perhaps offers a chance at winning a World Series. Baseball is more than a game in Boston—it is the city's number one sport. The Red Sox management recognizes the unique loyalty that exists among the fans and has pulled on their heartstrings to justify management's case.

Advocating for an Alternative

Building a new Boston baseball stadium and tearing down the legendary park poses incredible risk to the team. Any attempt to simulate the "look" of the old ballpark in new construction

cannot compensate for the loss of the real place where generations of fans and players have joined each other for some of the greatest baseball played in the 20th century. The Red Sox are a mythic franchise and a beloved New England institution. Fenway Park is largely responsible for this special status among baseball clubs. The team and its park have been entwined and identified with each other for close to a century. Abandoning this essential part of the team's heritage will extinguish the special aura of tradition that surrounds the ball club today and will undoubtedly have a negative economic impact as well. Save Fenway Park!, a grassroots organization of individuals and organizations, Boston area residents, and business owners—fans all—believes that Fenway Park is the Red Sox' most valuable asset. Whether the team wins or loses, the Red Sox have always enjoyed strong attendance. Save Fenway Park! has recognized this unexplained anomaly and attributes Fenway Park's unique history, physical features, and "sense of place" combined to form the "Fenway Factor" as the motivation for people to attend ball games there. Recognizing that the park is in need of modernization and thoughtful expansion, Save Fenway Park! has been advocating for a compromise that meets the needs of the team, the fans, and the taxpayers. The new stadium proposed by the Red Sox has failed to garner support of the Fenway community, a majority of taxpayers, and countless fans. Critics cite the tremendous cost, the requirement for more than \$300 million in public funding, the destruction of dozens of viable businesses, and the questionable legality of public land takings for a private stadium project as objectionable elements of the new stadium plans. In response to these issues, Save Fenway Park! has promoted an alternative that calls for a renovation of the ballpark on its existing site rather than a newly constructed facility. Only a renovated ballpark can fully capitalize on the history and passion integral to the existing site. It alone offers the opportunity to market the best of the "old" with the "new." The addition of 10,000 new seats through the construction of a second deck and a sufficient number of luxury suites, concessions, an expanded concourse area for improved accessibility and circulation, and fully modern team amenities would meet the Red Sox programmatic needs. The renovation alternative would also increase the team's revenue streams putting Fenway Park on par with the new "retro-

style" ballparks around the country. The renovation alternative, estimated to be approximately half the project cost of a new stadium, avoids the need for public funding or questionable use of eminent domain land seizures while preserving the authentic experience that fans have enjoyed since 1912. The playing field, the walls (including, of course, the "Green Monster"), the bleachers, and the brick exterior of the original ballpark would remain as they have for decades. Familiar, accessible, intimate, and historic—preserved through thoughtful renovation, Fenway Park would continue to embody the characteristics that contribute most to the fan's desirable experience.⁵

Save Fenway Park! offers a solution that combines the amenities of a new park with the many layers of history and association that makes Fenway so special while minimizing the impacts on its neighborhood.

Notes

- 1 Robert F. Bluthardt. "Fenway Park and the Golden Age of the Baseball Park 1909-1915." *Journal of Popular Culture* (Summer 1987), 51.
- 2 The Red Sox Official Website, Copyright 1996-2000, The Boston Red Sox and New England Sports Network, Ltd.: (www.redsox.com).
- 3 Joanna Cagan and Neil deMause. *Field of Schemes: How the Great Stadium Swindle Turns Public Money into Private Profit* Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1998. *Field of Schemes* details many of the stories from Baltimore, Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Seattle of sports team owners using their money and their political muscle to get their way even against stiff public opposition. It also tells the stories of how spirited local groups—like those in the Tiger Stadium Fan Club in Detroit and Save Our Sox in Chicago—who fought an uphill battle to stop wealthy owners from sabotaging the games they love and picking the public's pocket for private profit.
- 4 Matthew Bolster Bronski. *The Garden in the Machine: The Cultural Landscape of the Major League Baseball Parks of 1909-1923*, (M.A. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 59.
- 5 *Save Fenway Park: An Economic and Planning Analysis*, March 1998. Save Fenway Park! P.O. Box 873, Boston, MA 02103. (www.savefenwaypark.com).

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